THE COURIER

Vol. XXI. March 24th, 1917 No. 17

HODGE GETS HIS SECOND WIND

WHEN Henry Hodge, of Hodge and Carlaw, brokers, took the stretch depicted in the accompanying illustration he had begun to get a vision. If you know Hodge—perhaps you do—you would notice that his chest some time ago dropped to his waist line and that he never could run half a block to catch a crossbound street car without palpitation of the heart. A little more intimately you would discover that Hodge had three corns, occasional visits of lumbago, symptoms of sciatica—and that on three different occasions lately, when he tried to touch the floor with his fingers without bending his knees he thought his legs were snapping off behind.

In spite of all these infirmities, Hodge had his vision in the spring of 1917. Not spring fever. He knows what that is—second cousin to la grippe. Not the go-west desire. No, he got over that ten years ago. Not sudden conversion at a Billy Sunday revival. No, nor falling in love over again—because Hodge is happily married and is the father of one son and two daughters, the son being now in khaki.

No, the thing that happened to Hodge was the thing that for years had been lying low in what the new writers call his subconscious strata. It was the awakening of a new man that he had done his best to bury years ago about the time his three children were half through school. That was the time when Hodge began to be a curler and quit going out nights for anything else; began to live in religious comfort among his family—nice income, pleasant home, good neighbourhood, flourishing church to usher in, respectable club connections, now and then a good cigar, a turn at politics, occasional letters to the editor—altogether, as comfortable a programme as a man could deside, all framed up in his life at the age of 51, when he began to sit back and feel very much at home with that pawky stomach of his, as he reflected that the main epic of his life was over and that hereafter he would live in his family, his grandchildren, etc.

YOU will suspect that the top o' the morning edge had gone out of Hodge's life; that he no longer had the bounding exuberance which once drove him to the field on his father's Ontario farm and when he was still a youth drove him to school and the town and the city. Hodge knew the symphony of the barnyard much better than any of the things played by the local orchestra. He knew the smell of the horse-stable better than the perfumes of his little conservatory. And if ever he took time to think about his subconscious self he could feel the grip of the fork-handle and the stretch of the arms that whopped a wad of clover hay on to the top of a load.

Of late years Hodge had begun to talk about these things, much to the horror of his girls, who didn't care to think their dear old dad had ever been a bumpkin. But of course girls don't really understand a man of fifty. Hodge had brought up his family very well and in so doing, along with his business and his church and his club and all the rest of the sociological machine, he had enveloped as neat a bundle of routine habits as any man ever had outside of a jail. In fact, as he sometimes muttered to his folk somewhat darkly, he was in a class with the cow of 1917 that follows the cow track made by the ancestral cow of 1867. Mrs. Hodge didn't like this. The girls thought it was horrid.

"Can't help it, my dears. It's a fact."

Something was getting into dad lately. Like everybody else, of course he had been talking a great

Sketch Number One

By AUGUSTUS BRIDLE

Illustration by T. W. McLean

deal about what it costs to live.

"Costs me," he would say, in a loud voice, "half as much for taxes on my house as it used to cost my father to bring up a family of seven. How's that for high?"

This recrudescence of farm speech was not pleasant to the women folk. But it was very expressive. Hodge recalled the good old days when tea was a dollar and cheese seven cents a pound; when a day's work went for a dollar and the dollar, as time went on, got more and more purchasing power with the spread of railways, the improvement of production, and so on.

Oh, Hodge had a good many neat notions about political economy. He could out-talk most of his club confreres on the elements of what it costs to live—one of the dreariest subjects known to mortal man. He remembers that the dollar value was highest when the farmer got three dollars per cwt. for hogs and seventy-five cents a bushel for wheat. The amount of food a man could buy for a day's work in those days reads like a fable now to Mr. Hodge, as he puts a new record on his $500 music machine. Dollar eggs, 55-cent butter, 80-cents-a-peck potatoes—such things make Hodge swear to himself that if he were ten years younger he would sell out his business, rent his city house and go back to the land. In which case Mr. Hodge would be another high-cost producer.

HODGE gets into his customary clothes and scans over the morning paper; reads something about food scarcity, impending famines, shortage of land workers the world over; and he lifts his voice in denunciation of things in general. The country should produce more. Land should be worked right up to the limit. Every rood of land within haulable distance of a railway should be getting ready to produce in 1917. Not to produce more and yet more in a new country like Canada is an economic crime. Hodge knows it. He says so.

Our deep interest in Hodge arises from the fact that he writes letters to the editor. His epistles are so pointed and came, of late, so much in a heap, that we began to diagnose him. We estimate Hodge—no charges for this reading—as a man who at the age of 51 had settled down to develop a stomach and to let his family renew his youth unto the third generation. At 60 he intended to become a grandfather. After that, spectacles and rheumatics. But Hodge's letters indicate that something is happening to destroy all this. In working out his ideas of economics he sometimes becomes quite personal. We like him for this. Hodge is evidently a Methodist.

"Mr. Editor," he says, in one of his epistles, "I daresay you are in the same class with all other pen-pushers I know. You have never made more than enough money yourself to keep your family off the township; but you are up to the ears with advice to other people, and municipalities and governments how to conduct their affairs according to the doctrines laid down in the Wealth of Nations. Like all other editors, also, you let the horse get away before you locked the stable door. The world had to begin going to economic perdition before you started to tell us what was wrong with it on a basis of debit and credit. Did you notice that recent cartoon of the hunger snake coiled around the globe? That startled me. And I guess if that wise-acre D.D., Dr. Malthus, were alive now it would have startled him. Malthus, you will remember, was the man who got off the bogey about population pressing on subsistence, as he called it, never dreamed that if we'd stop killing the men we'd all have food enough and more—because we're putting food-producers out of buisness. Germany, France, England—all chucked on to the rest of the world for food: England cropping her parks and hewing down her forests to get wheat in, just as we did in Canada in my own father's time. And what is America doing? Talking about food scarcity. The sun might as well talk about a lack of heat. Canada, of course, is peculiarly up against it. If we had all our farms and our producers pulled together into a country the size of Ontario we could do much better. As it stands now, we are likely to drop considerably below 1915, and may not go much ahead of 1916 unless we go at it as hard as my father used to bushwhack."

WE trace in this letter the effect of one or two stretches of Hodge to reach the floor with a stick as long as from his finger-tips to his nose, swung back from his nose over his head. That was an old suppling-up trick of his boyhood. Having